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Winsløv, Jan-Henrik; Christiansen, Rikke; Dukai, Louise

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Suicidal patients' evaluation of supplementary psychoeducational program

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INTRODUCTION

The positive effect of psychoeducation is well-documented across different psychiatric disorders. Psychoeducation might improve the understanding of psychiatric illness and distress, strengthen empowerment, treatment adherence as well as potentially reduce relapses and drop-outs. Only few studies have examined the effect of psychoeducation directed towards patients at risk of suicide. This is surprising given that psychoeducation might improve problem-solving, empowerment, and reduce self-stigmatizing and suicidality.

AIMS

The aim of this study was to examine patient's evaluation of a psychoeducational program that supplements the individual treatment in order to enhance the psychoeducation program.

METHOD

The Unit for Suicide Prevention, Psychiatry - Aalborg University Hospital received patients referred after suicide attempt or severe suicidal ideation. During June, 2016 to November, 2016, psychoeducation was offered to 6 groups of patients at the clinic.

The psychoeducational program consisted of 4 sessions divided into two meetings of 90-120 minutes. The program covered topics relevant for suicidal patients in outpatient treatment. Topics at the first meeting were: suicidality (prevalence, riskfactors, suicidal thoughts and behavior), crisis (trauma and stress) and typical reaction of the relatives. At the second meeting reasons for living and dying were discussed, as well as the implications of being in psychotherapeutic treatment.

After completing the program the patients were asked to answer a questionnaire which consisted of 10 items (5 questions using a 5 point Likert scale and elaborate open-ended questions, and 5 open-ended questions). The patients were asked to rate and describe the relevance and level of the psychoeducation, what they found helpful in respectively the teaching and the conversation in the group. They were also allowed to address what they found difficult or uncomfortable in the participation as well as suggestions for improvements of the program.

RESULTS

In all, 28 patients (15 men and 13 women) aged 18-61 years participated in the study (Figure 1). Of the patients, 15 were referred to the clinic after a suicide attempt, 13 due to suicidal ideation.

In general, the patients found the psychoeducation to be highly relevant and rewarding, especially the dialogue that took place in the groups was recognized as rewarding (Figure 2). The level of the information was evaluated as "appropriate" by 68 % of the patients and "high" by 28 %, they considered the teachers as competent.

The outcome of the teaching was overly rated positive; most the patients indicated that the teaching was helpful to the extent of "pretty much" or "very much". Patients emphasized that the program had helped them understand their reactions and strengthened their emotional literacy. They also felt recognized by the teachers as well as gained a better understanding of the psychotherapy. The conversation in the groups made them feel less lonely and stigmatized. Several patients mentioned that the participation was an "exposure in vivo", which made it easier for them to tell family and friends about their problems. In addition, the patients expressed a wish of more sessions and practical advice regarding coping with sleeping difficulties, dealing with difficult emotions and suicidal impulses.

Figure 1 Distribution of sex and age

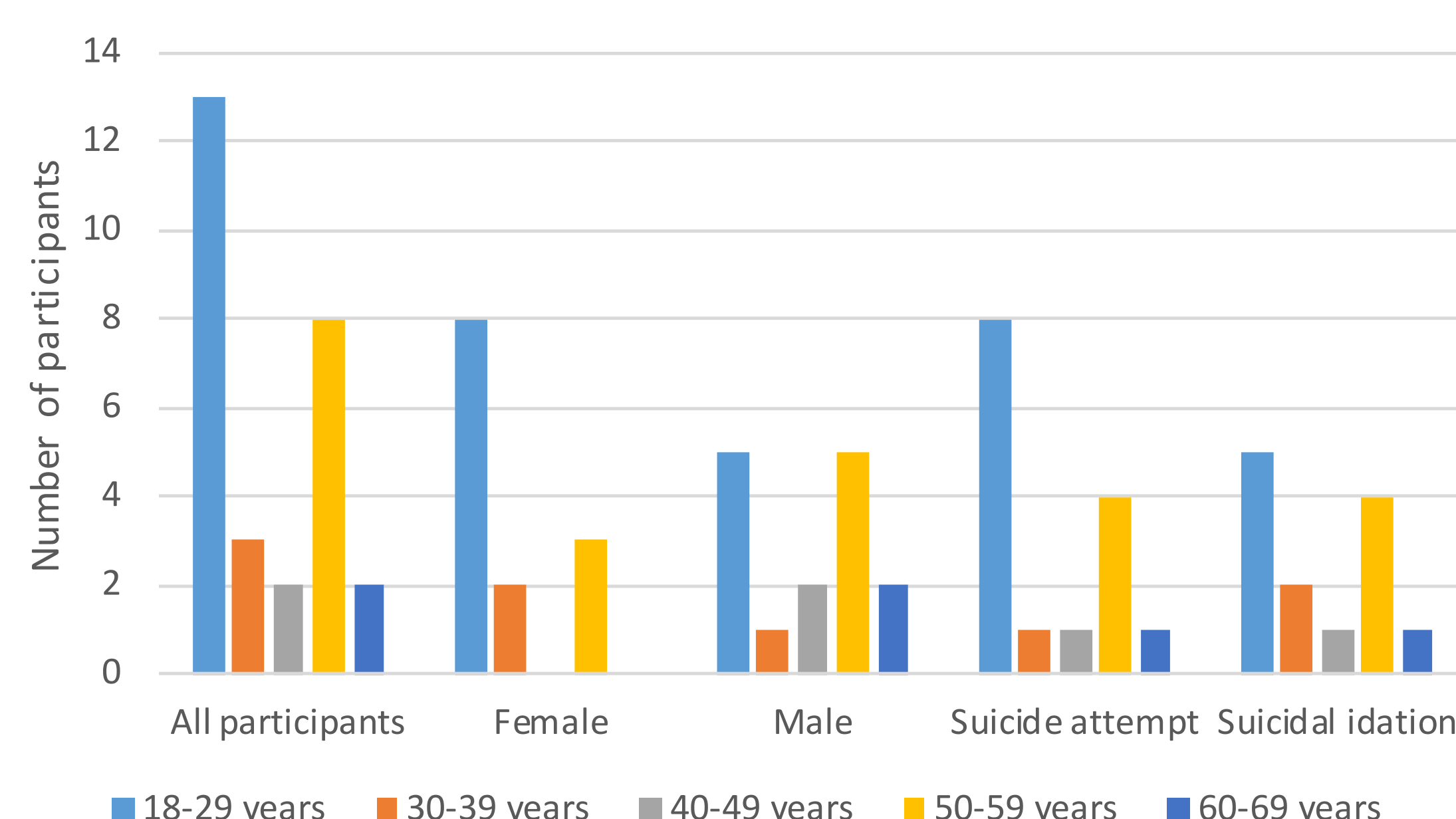
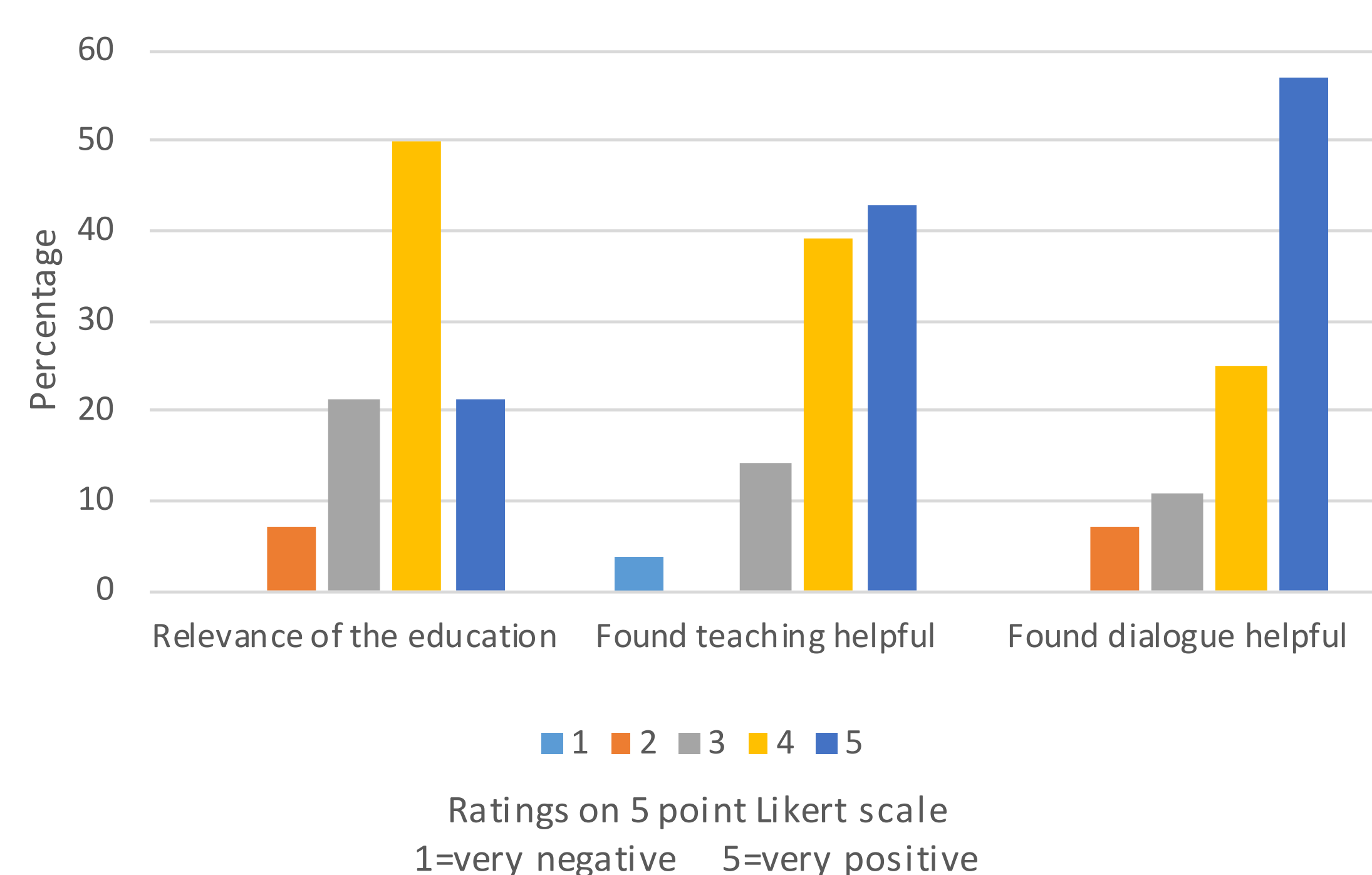


Figure 2 The patients' evaluation of the psychoeducation



CONCLUSION

The study shows that the patients find the psychoeducation rewarding; they gained a better understanding of their suicidality and strengthened their emotional literacy. They feel less lonely and stigmatized and their understanding of psychotherapy is enhanced. Based on the patients' and therapists'/teachers' feedback, more sessions will be added to the psychoeducational program as well as an effect study of the psychoeducation.